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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

United States of America: draft resolution

Forced and early marriage

The Commission on the Status of Women,

Reaffirming the obligations of all States to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, as stated in the Charter of the United Nations and guided by the purposes and principles of human rights instruments,

Reaffirming also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that men and women of full age have the right to marry and to found a family, and that marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses,

Concerned that there is a gap between countries' customs, traditions and practices and their laws, as some nations in which forced and early marriage occurs have laws establishing a minimum age of marriage,

Recognizing that early childbearing continues to be an impediment to improvement in the educational, economic and social status of women in all parts of the world, and that forced and early marriage and early motherhood can severely curtail educational and employment opportunities and are likely to have a long-term, adverse impact on the quality of the lives of women and those of their children,

Recognizing that forced and early marriage contributes to girls' faring disproportionately worse than boys in terms of access to primary school,

Recognizing also that motherhood at a very young age entails complications during pregnancy and delivery and a risk of maternal death that is much greater than average,

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Recognizing further that forced and early marriage increases the risk of HIV infection,

Concerned that forced and early marriage can involve threatening behaviour, abduction, imprisonment, physical violence, rape and even murder,

Recognizing that women who marry at a young age are more likely to experience domestic violence than women who marry at an older age, resulting from their lack of status and power in the marriage and household,

Recognizing also that forced and early marriage undercuts international efforts to fight poverty and HIV/AIDS and to improve maternal and child health, survival and welfare,

1. *Urges* States:

(a) To enact and strictly enforce laws to ensure that marriage is entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses and, in addition, to enact and strictly enforce laws concerning the minimum age of consent and the minimum age for marriage and raise the minimum age for marriage where necessary,

(b) To adopt and enforce requirements for registration of birth and marriage, with the aim of definitively determining age at the time of marriage,

(c) To include in their reports to human rights treaty bodies, as appropriate, information on national efforts to address forced and early marriage,

(d) To increase access to and encourage completion of primary and secondary education for married and unmarried girls,

(e) To establish educational programmes and develop teaching materials and textbooks, as appropriate, that will sensitize and inform women, girls, men and boys about the harmful effects of forced and early marriage,

(f) To train law enforcement and judiciary officials on forced and early marriage laws and their effective implementation;

2. *Urges* States and the United Nations system:

(a) To develop a national strategy of prevention and treatment to effectively address the condition of obstetric fistula and to further develop a multisectoral, comprehensive and integrated approach to bring about lasting solutions and a meaningful response to the problem of obstetric fistula and related morbidities,

(b) To integrate prevention initiatives against forced and early marriage into international development programmes to further health, education and employment,

(c) To monitor progress in efforts to address forced and early marriage through the regular collection, analysis, and dissemination of data, and to work towards overcoming the challenges of collecting information on the practice;

3. *Invites* Governments, as well as the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors:

(a) To conduct public education and awareness campaigns to raise awareness about the causes and consequences of forced and early marriage and the benefits of delaying marriage, especially keeping in mind those who may be in positions of

particular influence to help eradicate forced and early marriage, including parents, teachers and religious leaders,

(b) To sensitize the girl child, parents, teachers and society concerning good general health and nutrition and raise awareness of the health dangers and other problems connected with early pregnancies,

(c) To increase access to health care by providing medical facilities, training for health care workers, equipment, supplies and transportation in communities that practice forced and early marriage,

(d) To support and expand nutrition and immunization programmes for young mothers and their children,

(e) To address the needs of young married girls regarding family planning and HIV/AIDS prevention, care, testing and treatment programmes,

(f) To establish shelters offering counselling and education services for girls who escape forced and early marriages,

(g) To support programmes to eliminate violence against women.

(h) To continue to study the links between forced and early marriage and poverty; customs, traditions and practices; health; education; and economic empowerment;

4. *Invites* non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors:

(a) To advocate at the local, national, regional and international levels on forced and early marriage, including through building and strengthening networks among those who may call attention to its adverse consequences,

(b) To increase coordination and cooperation in addressing forced and early marriage, and continue to present their observations and conclusions to Governments;

5. *Requests* the Secretary-General, in his report to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-second session, to include information on forced and early marriage, and encourages Governments to cooperate with the Secretary-General by providing precise data on the subject.